The Pathways English Majors Committee has devised a 3 course sequence intended to serve as an entry ramp for students intending to pursue English majors. It begins with basic coursework in English Composition that is part of the 30-credit common core and then merges, more or less gradually, with introductory coursework in the major or concentration proper. It is equally suitable for implementation at community and baccalaureate-granting colleges, and, because it was developed with existing curricula in mind, we believe most departments will have little difficulty in adopting it. That said, it must be emphasized that there is considerable debate nationally over what a standard college curriculum in English should look like.

As indicated, the first of the three courses is simply the first three credits in English Composition from the fixed portion of the 30-credit common core, however those courses are delivered on the different campuses. Accordingly, we have simply “dropped in” for this item in the sequence the outcomes from the relevant section of the Task Force recommendations, now approved by the Chancellor.

The second course is a menu of three courses covered by the rubric “Introduction to Literature.” The “Introduction to Literature” course is intended to provide students with an introductory college-level experience in reading and writing about literary texts that is largely unmediated by discipline-specific methodological concerns. Under the general rubric, there would be three options, of which each campus would adopt only one: Introduction to World Literature; Introduction to Writing about Literature; or Introduction to English, American, or Anglophone Literature. “Introduction to World Literature” would likely overlap with the “World Cultures” area of the Flexible Core, “Introduction to Writing About Literature” might overlap with the second three credits of English Composition, and “Introduction to English, American, or Anglophone Literature” (which comprises its own sub-menu) could either overlap with the “World Cultures” area of the Flexible Core or be an introductory course within the major. All of these courses would share a common “Introduction to Literature” set of outcomes, though individually they might have additional outcomes.

The third course, “Introduction to Literary Studies,” would begin to equip students with the concepts, analytical tools, research methods, and basic historical knowledge they would need to pursue further coursework in the field. Though its implementation would obviously vary from campus to campus (not to say from teacher to teacher), this would be a single course, not a rubric covering a limited menu.

Though ideally the courses would be taken in the sequence outlined here, strictly speaking, the third course does not presume the second as preparation (nor, of course, the other way around). Thus, while a semester of English Composition should be a prerequisite for both “Introduction to Literature” and “Introduction to Literary Studies,” neither should be a prerequisite for the other. In baccalaureate-granting institutions both “Introduction to Literature” and “Introduction to Literary Studies” should be considered co- or pre-requisites for further coursework in the major.

While it is hoped that the creation of this sequence will facilitate intra-CUNY transfer for prospective English majors, the Committee wishes to emphasize that many obstacles to efficient
transfer remain, including an unwieldy and unreliable TIPPS system, inconsistencies across campuses in the evaluation of major courses for transfer purposes, and difficulties in the implementation of articulation agreements where they exist, all problems discussed to a greater or lesser extent in Associate University Provost Julia Wrigley’s October 2010 report on “Improving Student Transfer at CUNY.” Some of these issues are best addressed by the Central Office, others by the Discipline Council of Chairs of English.

Below, we list each course or category with its outcomes:

A. English Composition

A course in this area must meet all of the following learning outcomes. A student will:
• Read and listen critically and analytically, including identifying an argument’s major assumptions and assertions and evaluating its supporting evidence.
• Write clearly and coherently in varied, academic formats (such as formal essays, research papers, and reports) using standard English and appropriate technology to critique and improve one’s own and others’ texts.
• Demonstrate research skills using appropriate technology, including gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing primary and secondary sources.
• Support a thesis with well-reasoned arguments, and communicate persuasively across a variety of contexts, purposes, audiences, and media.
• Formulate original ideas and relate them to the ideas of others by employing the conventions of ethical attribution and citation.

B. Introduction to Literature

A course in this area must meet all of the following learning outcomes. A student will:
• Be able to respond proficiently in writing (i.e. per the outcomes for “A”) to literary works.
• Display familiarity with literary works by a variety of authors in a variety of genres.
• Be able to offer an extended discussion in writing of two or more texts and authors in relation to each other.
• Demonstrate the ability to analyze and interpret based on careful attention both to the detail and overall design of a literary work.
• Demonstrate an understanding of the role of context in determining meaning.

C. Introduction to Literary Studies

A course in this area must meet all of the following learning outcomes. A student will:
• Display a working knowledge of basic terms and concepts used in the analysis of a variety of literary genres.
• Demonstrate an understanding of how literary works relate to their immediate historical context and to the traditions from which they emerge.
• Be able to undertake the close reading of a literary work, with particular emphasis on the relationship between parts and wholes and between form and meaning.
• Be able to construct a literary argument using secondary sources (in particular discipline-specific databases and archives) and employing MLA style.
• Engage in written reflection on the critical assumptions that inform their own and others’ interpretations of literary works.

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Addendum

Except for minor changes, this report was completed and unanimously approved by the committee on February 3, 2012. A controversy subsequently arose within the University community over an administrative guideline restricting courses in the Pathways Common Core to 3 credits/3 hours (with certain exceptions for the STEM disciplines). Part of the controversy has been over whether instructional hours should in every case be so limited and whether this is properly a matter for administrative rather than faculty determination. But another part of the controversy appears to have been due, at least in part, to the ambiguity of the term “contact hours”: as referring, on the one hand, to instructional hours, and, on the other hand, to units of compensated labor time. Since it is considered a best practice in the teaching of composition, not only within CUNY but nationally, for contact hours, understood as units of compensation, to exceed contact hours understood as instructional hours (so as to allow for careful feedback on student writing, including one-on-one conferencing), the University administration’s 3 credit/3 hour rule for core courses under Pathways elicited a special statement of protest, distributed on or around February 10, from the English Discipline Council. More recently, the administration has stated in a communication of February 20 that “in the meantime, no changes will be made in current practices regarding faculty workload credit for contact hours.” We welcome this important clarification from the administration. We also take this opportunity to endorse on a standing basis and with a view to the future the principles informing the statement of the English Discipline Council.

The Pathways English Majors Committee March 1, 2012